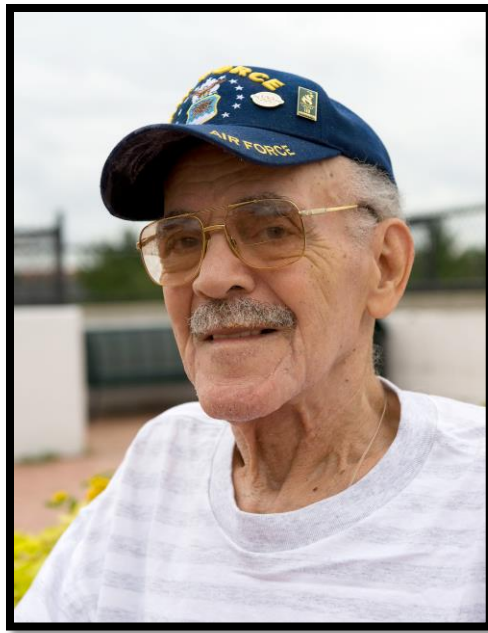


Mal Whitfield, U.S. Air Force Veteran, 1943-1952



Tuskegee Airman, Olympic medalist, and sports goodwill ambassador; these are just a few of the many hats that WWII Veteran and track and field star Malvin G. Whitfield wears.

Born on October 11, 1924, “Marvelous Mal” has lived a long life fueled by his desire to win and inspire others. A naturally gifted athlete, he looked up to Olympic track legends Jesse Owens, Eddie Tolan, and Ralph Metcalfe. Even though Whitfield was drafted straight out of high school in 1943, he made sure to take his athletic skills with him.

Through what was previously known as the “Boot Strap” program, the Air Force allowed Whitfield the chance to attend Ohio State University while still serving the country. This gave him the opportunity to further his athletic training by representing his school at track meets, bringing him closer to his dreams of competing on the world stage.

In the 1948 Olympic Games in London, Air Force Sergeant Whitfield won two gold medals and one bronze medal, making him the first American serviceman to win gold while in active duty. In 1950, his time at Ohio State ended when he was called to serve as a combat flyer in the Korean War, yet he continued to train in between flying missions. He went on to win three gold medals in the 1951 Pan American Games in Buenos Aires and took away one gold and one silver from the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki. Throughout his track career, he set 18 world records and went on to become the first black athlete to win the James E. Sullivan Memorial Award.

After Whitfield was honorably discharged in the fall of 1952, he went to Los Angeles State University to continue his education and earn his BS degree. He also went on to a fruitful diplomatic career, serving as a Youth and Sports Affairs Officer for the United States Information Agency and a Sports Goodwill Ambassador, appointed by the Department of State to tour Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. He also went on to establish the Whitfield Foundation, a non-profit “dedicated to the promotion of sports, academics, and culture around the globe.”

Originally born in Bay City, Texas, Whitfield grew up in Los Angeles, California, after losing his father at the age of four. A few years later, he lost his mother and was raised by his sister. Despite his early challenges, Whitfield never gave up. There is truly a legend living within the walls of the Washington DC VA Medical Center.